United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/950
9 August 1991

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General says taking of French hostage in Beirut "is most unhelpful" in his efforts to get all detainees released.

- Secretary-General expresses "deep concern" over recent military action in Western Sahara.

- Security Council unanimously recommends admission of Micronesia and Marshall Islands as members of United Nations; hears report by Secretary-General on United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador.

- Secretary-General says this year's observation of International Day of Solidarity with Women of South Africa comes at a time which "holds great promise".

- Executive Director of United Nations International Drug Control Programme to meet with President of Peru.

- British actor Roger Moore signs contract with United Nations Children's Fund to become its Special Representative for Film Arts.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar this morning commented on the taking of a French hostage, Jerome Leyraud, whom the kidnappers threatened to kill if the other hostages held in Lebanon were freed.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar told correspondents outside his residence that the kidnapping "in some ways" was "totally counter-productive" and "most unhelpful" in his efforts to get the remaining hostages released.

When asked if he had been in touch with the Israeli Government regarding the possibility of releasing some individuals detained by the Israeli authorities, the Secretary-General replied that he had not been in contact with that Government yet, but would be if necessary.

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The Secretary-General said he was "still hopeful" that a second hostage would be released soon. He said he had been in contact with his sources in Beirut this morning and that they had expressed hope.

The Secretary-General said he had postponed his visit to London on his way to Geneva, until tomorrow . On Sunday, he is expected to meet freed British hostage, John McCarthy, who will hand over to him the message from the Islamic Jihad.

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A United Nations spokeswoman said today that Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar was "deeply concerned" by the recent developments and the military action that has occurred in the Western Sahara.

The Secretary-General had appealed to all concerned to refrain from any action which would endanger the implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan for the Western Sahara or jeopardize the truce which had hitherto existed. The spokeswoman said the appeal came in the light of the undertaking by both parties to refrain from any act which might lead to hostilities prior to the formal cease-fire on 6 September, to which both sides have agreed.

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The Security Council this afternoon acted without a vote to recommend admission of two South Pacific States, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, to the United Nations.

In other developments, the Secretary-General briefed earlier today members of the Council on the first steps being taken by the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL).

In a statement to the Council, made available in Spanish only, the Secretary-General expressed concern about the safety of United Nations staff participating in the Mission. He said that he had already received complaints about cease-fire violations by the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN).

In a separate development concerning Central America, Foreign Minister of Honduras, Mario Carias Zapata, has asked the United Nations to establish observation posts along the border between Honduras and Nicaragua to prevent subversive elements from entering into the country.

In a letter addressed to the Chief Military Observer of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA), Mr. Zapata expressed concern over armed incidents which, he said, had occurred along the border recently involving elements opposed to the Nicaraguan Government.

The request for United Nations assistance was transmitted in a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 6 August, by the Permanent Representative of Honduras, Roberto Flores Bermudez.

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The Special Committee against Apartheid this morning held a meeting to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Struggle of Women in South Africa. Prominent women from South Africa were invited to the meeting as special guests.

The observance marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of the demonstration staged on 9 August 1956 in Pretoria by more than 20,000 women to protest the extension of the pass laws to cover African women. Their action focused world attention on the injustices and indignities suffered by the black majority in South Africa.

In a message read out on his behalf at the meeting, the Secretary-General said the women of South Africa had borne a heavy burden over decades under the system of apartheid. They had faced an immense challenge -- often as heads of families -- to preserve the social fabric and instil in their children the ethics of work and the love of justice.

This year, the Secretary-General said, the International Day was being observed at a time which held great promise. The process under way in South Africa should lead, through negotiations, to a constitution that would provide for a united, non-racial, and democratic society.

In a related development, speakers addressing the Human Rights Commission, yesterday in Geneva, called on South Africa to ratify human rights instruments. They also recommended that continued pressure be applied in South Africa until full elimination of the remaining apartheid laws were implemented.

Several experts at the meeting stressed that black Africans would not necessarily be the immediate or substantial beneficiaries of any improvements resulting from the lifting of sanctions. They proposed that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for the Human Rights Subcommission should be extended to monitor apartheid in transition in that country.

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